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ABSTRACT

This guide describes well-established and practical pedagogical behaviors for a foreign language teacher in an ordinary situation, a classroom with 20-35 pupils who are beginning the study of a foreign language in school or college. The first chapter, "The Five Stages," discusses the stages through which an item (a word, construction, or idiom) in a language is learned: recognition, imitation, repetition, variation, and selection. The second chapter, "The First Day in the FL class: the Teacher's Presentation," emphasizes the importance of teaching communicative competence and, therefore, of placing the student in real-life situations. The student must learn real FL sentences and use a natural speed for speaking. Tactics of presenting material for oral habit formation are considered in the third chapter. When presenting new material it is wise to begin with choral practice before calling on various sections, rows, or individual students. When dealing with longer sentences it is best to use the backward build up, for structural and psychological reasons. Suggestions are given on ways to teach rounded front vowels. The fourth chapter, "Some Tactics of Oral Practice," discusses techniques such as chain practice, reversed roles (student interrogates teacher), minimum responses, and dramatic reading and discusses what procedure to follow when a student hesitates or fumbles. The final chapter "From Oral Practice to Oral Skill: the Intermediate Levels" considers oral accuracy and oral fluency. In first-level work oral accuracy has a higher priority; at the second level fluency begins to become a main objective. The teacher must distinguish between times when accuracy should be insisted upon and times when fluency is the main goal. Restraint must always be used, however, in correction. (CPM)

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THE ORAL WORK IN A FL COURSE

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Some discussions of related matters have been reprinted in Teaching English (American Book Co., 1968) by George E. Wishon and Thomas J. O'Hare; pp. 25-41.

Much that is here grew out of discussion or correspondence with my colleagues and collaborators: R-M. S. Heffner, Patricia O'Connor, Helmut Rehder, A. K. Shields, Ursula Thomas. They contributed improvements of phrasing and arrangement, criticized the distribution of emphasis, and in general did much to improve the drafts of these papers. Often their words have found their way into the final versions. To them I record my thanks.

Providence, 1976 W. F. T.

FOREWORD

These discussions and comments are concerned with an unspectacular but crucial topic: the pedagogical behaviors of the teacher in an ordinary situation — a classroom with 20-35 pupils who are beginning the study of a foreign language as one of their courses in school or college.

In the recent past much has been written on theories about the learning of a foreign language and techniques of teaching one. Speculations and generalizations about a child's acquisition of its first ("native") language have sometimes been made the basis for speculations and generalizations about effective foreign-language learning and teaching. There have been appeals to doctrines about the nature of language as an abstract structure, to justify new pedagogies. Often the real situation of the classroom has been disregarded, and "language acquisition" has been described without considering the age, motivation, or previous linguistic experience of learners, or the size of classes, the length of class periods, the frequency of class meetings, the duration of the course.

If a teacher-training course is dominated by the presentation of recently evolved theories, it is an inadequate preparation for the real-life situation about to be faced by a new teacher or a teacher who has had to cope with classroom problems by improvising without systematic guidance. Such a teacher or future teacher needs to be guided to familiarity with the everyday basic techniques of managing a class. The teacher-training course can and should

present examples of such effective methodologies, and practice in applying them.

These discussions and comments, then, are gathered and presented as samples of classroom tactics, their use and the basis for their use. There is nothing novel or revolutionary about them; they are not exciting revelations of sensational breakthroughs of theory or discovery. On the contrary, they are well-established and thoroughly tested by the practical experience of many years; there is nothing mysterious or magical about these procedures, some or all of which have long been used by experienced teachers. They are simply descriptions of some of the ways a teacher can be effective in helping students begin to learn how to understand and communicate in a foreign language.

INTRODUCTION

[Throughout these discussions the abbreviation "FL" (=Foreign Language) is used to indicate any language being taught and learned under classroom conditions — French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, etc., and, of course, English as a foreign language.]

The first hours of a systematic program of teaching/learning a foreign language concentrate on oral training: speaking, and understanding speech. The duration of this period of concentrated oral training depends on the intellectual maturity of the learners — longest and most repetitive for the youngest, relatively shorter for learners who are older adolescents or adults. But regardless of the duration and intensity of the exclusively aural-oral phase, it is the beginning of the beginning of foreign-language acquisition.

For the learners, the aural-oral classroom activities are something new in their school lives; and this is a factor of foreign-language pedagogy of overriding importance for the teacher. A pedagogical breakdown in these initial hours of the foreign-language program can have disastrous consequences in learners' motivation, permanently affecting their whole attitude toward all aspects of the study of this foreign language and foreign languages in general.

Many teachers are native speakers of the same language as their pupils. For them, as for the pupils, the language being studied is a foreign language. Their control of that language is less than completely native-like; but this lack need not fatally impair their ability to function as effective teachers. What such a teacher needs in the beginnings of a FL course is accuracy, the ability to pronounce correctly and with the proper grammatical constructions just those sentences and phrases and constructions which the pupils are learning and practicing. (In the very process of directing the learners' practice, the teacher's own control of those sentences and constructions is reinforced and confirmed.)

On the other hand, teachers with exceptional conversational fluency will have to restrain themselves to keep within that part of the FL with which their students are familiar. For purposes of the classroom at any given hour, the FL sentences and constructions which the students have learned or are now practicing are the FL.

The teacher's skill in speaking the FL is focused on two classroom functions: (1) the teacher's use of the FL is a model for student imitation; (2) the teacher's knowledge of correct FL pronunciation and grammar is the basis for judging students' performances, correcting errors, and guiding remedial practice.

Such oral practice in the classroom is very different from a "direct method" or a "conversational" approach, which would demand of the teacher the kind of conversational fluency which comes only with long and continuing experience in using the FL in a wide variety of situations and with many different people.

The emphasis on a first oral stage of FL learning has a long history. For the American teaching profession, the present development goes back to the Army Specialized Training Program and the Civil Affairs Training Program during World War II. The pilot operation lay a few years further back, in the Intensive Language Program fathered by Mortimer Graves of the American Council of Learned Societies, supported by a major grant in 1941 from the Rockefeller Foundation. The experience of this Program made it possible to gather the needed resource persons and move quickly and effectively to supply the armed forces with materials and rosters of competent personnel, under the general guidance of Graves and J Milton Cowan, secretary of the Linguistic Society of America. Since then, the ideas and techniques have been adapted to general educational needs, through the work of proficient textbook writers, teacher trainers, curricular adaptations, and with the cooperation of enlightened publishers.

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I. "The five stages"

We may think of any item in a language — word, construction, or idiom — as going through five stages as it is learned: Recognition, Imitation, Repetition, Variation, and Selection.

* *

Recognition

There are two aspects of recognition in the learning of a new word, construction, or idiom of a language:

(1) the identification of the smaller elements of which it consists (sounds or letters, words, constructions);

(2) the identification of a meaning.

When these two aspects are both recognized and associated with each other, the learner has made the first crucial step toward the habitual use of the new word, construction or idiom.

Identification of the language form: When a learner encounters something new in a foreign language, he identifies it as consisting of a new combination of elements which are already familiar. For example, a new word is a combination of already-familiar sounds or letters. A new construction is a new combination of words or parts of words which the learner already knows. A new idiom is a new combination of words or constructions.

Identification of a meaning: After a new item has been identified as consisting of familiar smaller elements, it has to be associated with a meaning. This association takes

place through one or more of a variety of ways: from context, from gestures, from pictures, from explanations, or from an English parallel sentence in the student's book.

Imitation

Imitation begins the habit of using and understanding the meaningful word, construction, or idiom which has been recognized. In oral practice, this imitation involves the learner's immediate echoing of the FL which the teacher or a tape has just pronounced. These first imitations are the most direct and the simplest possible response to the stimulus of hearing the FL. The strain on memory is minimized at this stage, by having the learner perform immediately after the model. — This is the stage in which correction of wrong pronunciation habits properly occurs.

Repetition

Repetition both challenges and strengthens the learner's memory. In repetition the learner produces some FL without an immediately preceding model; that production has to be on the basis of memory. At this stage, the learner's native-language habits may conflict with those of the FL; and the teacher has to be both patient and firm in protecting students from the formation of wrong habits as they repeat. The correction, fortunately, is simple and natural; it is to return to the earlier stage, Imitation.

Variation

After the learner has begun the formation of a habit by imitation and repetition, a program of guided Variation leads to the production and understanding of other useful expressions, which are partly similar to and partly different from the models that have been repeated. Such variation practice involves the use of different vocabulary items with the same grammatical pattern, or different grammatical patterns with the same vocabulary items, up to the limit of the learner's experience in the language at the time.

Selection

Finally comes the stage of Selection, when the learner controls certain habits of vocabulary and sentence structure well enough to select, from among several or many FL sentences, that particular sentence which is required for a particular meaning in a particular situation. At this stage, the "machinery" for producing certain FL sentences has become habitual enough so that the learner can concentrate on meaning — the goal of language learning.

Errors and correction

At any of the five stages, the learners' native-language habits may interfere with their recognizing, or imitating, or repeating, or varying, or selecting

correctly. This happens with discouraging frequency in the early weeks and months of FL leaning, when the new habits are still too weak to resist the strong native-language habits. Whenever it happens, the corrective device is to go back at least one stage: If there is a mistake in selection, variation can guide the learner into selecting correctly through practice of parallel sentences. If there is a mistake in variation, repetition is called for. If there is an error in imitation, the remedy is more modeling to assure identification of either the language form-aspect or the meaning-aspect.

II. The first day in the FL class

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Many teachers find it helpful to spend part of the first class hour explaining to the students some of the special features of a beginning language course. During the latter part of the first class hour they illustrate what they have been explaining, by actually doing the first part of the first unit, thus showing their students some of the special language classroom customs that will be prevailing during the year.

Every school, every teacher, and every class have their own characteristic personalities; and no one inflexible introduction to the study of the FL could fit all the teaching situations at the beginning of the year. Naturally, every teacher will modify the order or the emphasis of the topics, and will bring life and authority into the explanation by using his or her own words.

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Learning a FL is performing in the FL

Most of you are studying a modern foreign language for the first time in our Beginning FL course. I hardly need tell you that all classes are different in the different subjects. But a modern foreign language is one of the MOST different subjects in the whole curriculum.

In the FL class you will be performing — performing in a number of different ways. You will be building up habits and skills to do in the FL what you learned to do in English as very young children: talk with people by saying things and understanding what is said to you, later on reading and understanding what you see in print or in writing, and finally learning how to write things that the users of the FL can understand.

The first stage is to build up habits of speaking and understanding what is spoken. In some ways, this is not only the first skill and the first set of habits you will need; it is also the one that at first calls for the most concentrated learning.

So for the first few hours of this FL course we won't be learning facts, but just building up some basic habits. These habits and skills of talking will gradually become more and more natural for you, and after a while the work on these speaking habits will be a smaller and smaller part of your total FL study, as you develop and practice skills and habits of reading useful and important messages in print and writing.

But for several weeks these pronouncing and listening habits and skills of making and understanding sentences will be our prime objective. We will learn what to say in real-life situations, and how to say it so that we can

be understood and can understand what is said to us. To do this we'll build up the needed habits by performing — pronouncing FL sentences and learning the right time to use the right sentence with a good pronunciation, and getting so much practice that when we hear one of our FL sentences we'll understand at once what it means.

Real FL sentences

This means that we'll be concentrating on performance and habit-forming practice, with real FL sentences. We'll learn a few FL sentences by heart every week, and then practice using them in different combinations and changing them around to make new FL sentences, just the way FL-speaking people make up their new sentences whenever they have something new to say.

At first we'll practice with very simple every-day sentences. Our first purpose will be to build up good pronunciation habits. In many ways the FL has to be pronounced differently from English; and it will take quite a while and a lot of practice to form the habit of using the FL sounds naturally. Later on we'll learn longer sentences and practice changing them around, part by part, to make new sentences. That way we'll be forming habits of making different sentences just like the speakers of the FL.

Hearing and speaking before reading and writing

We will always start work on a new group of sentences by hearing and speaking, then later on by reading and writing them. At first we'll practice speaking the sentences, one by one, and then in little conversations, until you can pronounce them easily and correctly. We will do this without looking at the FL sentences in the book, to make sure that we are forming the habits of hearing and speaking the FL. In the beginning this may seem harder than just reading, and you may think you would learn the sentences faster if you could see them at the same time you heard them and practiced speaking them. But in the long run it will save time to do our first practicing by just listening and speaking.

Habits are formed by practice

It will take a lot of practice to form the FL pronunciation habits. You have all been speaking English for many years now. Your speaking muscles have had a huge amount of practice in our English pronunciation habits, and it will take time to build up these new FL habits of using your lips and jaws and the muscles in your mouth and throat the way you have to in order to speak the FL and to understand the spoken FL.

Some of you have learned to play musical instruments, and you know that you have to build up habits of using your fingers in new patterns of movements before you can really play an instrument. It's the same way in sports: it takes a lot of practice to develop the right kind of muscle habits to be able to kick or to throw or catch or hit a football or baseball or basketball or tennis ball. The same way, you have to learn many new habits before you can really ride a bicycle, and then after you have the bicycle-riding habits under control, you can begin to take trips and use the bicycle for practical errands and trips.

The FL requires new speaking habits

Every language has its own pronunciation habits, just as every sport has its own muscle habits. After you have learned to bat well in baseball, it's hard at first to learn to use a racket to hit a tennis ball, until you have developed those tennis habits. It will be the same way at first when you speak the FL because your speaking muscles will still be trying to move according to their English-pronouncing habits. This is perfectly natural, and everybody has to spend many hours practicing a new language until the new habits get built up. Even then, the English pronunciation habits will keep getting in the

way for a long time; so all year we'll be watching out for slips of this kind. Every now and then we'll have special practice on the points where the strong English habits are still interfering with your new FL habits.

Natural speed for speaking

One thing we will have to watch out for is speed in speaking. Since we all have our English-speaking habits well formed, we can speak and understand our own language at a rate of many syllables a second. Naturally, speakers of the FL can do the same in the FL. At first the normal speed of the FL will seem very fast to you, and maybe you will want me to slow down and let you slow down. But we mustn't do this. It is much better to practice a sentence more times until we can speak it and understand it at normal speed. We have to be especially careful not to get into the bad habit of speaking a sentence word-by-word. The FL speakers don't speak the FL word-by-word, any more than we speak English word-by-word. Whenever a sentence is too long for you to be able to speak it right through at normal speed, I will break it up into parts for you, and we'll build it up part by part — not word-by word! — until it is easy. After we have practiced the whole sentence for a while, it will begin to sound natural and familiar and the first impression of speed will wear off.

One reason why we do speaking practice first and do it at normal speed is to build up good reading habits for later. In order to read with enjoyment we have to read by word-groups, not painfully word-by-word. After our speaking and listening practice at normal speed we will be used to word-groups, and the result will be better reading habits, like the reading habits of FL speakers when they read the FL.

FL letters spell FL words

There's another reason for practicing the new sentences by listening and speaking before we look at the printed FL. That is the spelling system in the FL. FL pronunciation is different from English. So of course the letters in FL spelling have to mean different pronunciations from what those same letters mean for English. When we learn the pronunciation first before we see the spelling, we can more quickly learn the way the FL uses letters in its spelling. But if you saw the letters before you had practiced pronouncing, the letters would naturally suggest to you their English pronunciation meanings, and that would make it harder for you to speak the FL with the FL pronunciation habits. So we'll always practice by speaking until we are really familiar with the FL sentences. Then we will learn how the FL spells and

prints the sentences we have already learned to speak and understand. We'll find that after our regular speaking practice it will be easy to learn the FL spelling and printing habits. But the other way around would be much less efficient and much slower. So we'll always keep the FL hidden when we first practice a new sentence or phrase. After we have become really familiar with the new sentences by speaking and understanding, we'll move on to reading and writing what we have already learned.

How we will practice

By now you're probably wondering how we are going to do this speaking and understanding practice. Well, there are two general ideas that we will follow [These can be written on the chalkboard]: 1. Listening before speaking. 2. Large-group speaking before small-group speaking.

First: Whenever we come to a new sentence you will have your books open to the corresponding English sentence. I will pronounce the new FL sentence. Naturally, I'll say it at normal speed, but loud enough for all of you to hear it clearly. I'll move around the classroom and say it four or five times in different places, so that all of you will have a good chance to hear it. While I'm saying the FL sentence, you can glance at the English in your books, to make sure you understand what the FL sentence means.

Second: Then we'll begin practicing the sentence. First of all, everybody will practice together four or five times, like a chorus, like a chorus practicing one line of a song. Then we'll practice with halves of the class — the front half and the back half, the half by the windows and the half by the wall there — while the other half listens. Then we'll do it by teams, or rows. After all that practice, we'll have some students do it individually. By that time, everybody will have had enough practice to be really familiar with the sentence.

At first, I'll work on getting the right rhythm and the right melody, because that's about all any of us will be able to hear clearly. And these are the most important things about a sentence — rhythm and melody. By the time we get down to practicing by teams, we'll begin to hear the pronunciation of the separate syllables, and the separate sounds. That's the time when we'll work on the fine points of FL pronunciation. Whenever I hear a mistake in one of the FL sounds in the sentence, we can practice the word. We will usually go back to practicing with a larger group. And I'll build the sentence up for you, first the word, then the word-group, then the whole sentence. After that, we'll go ahead practicing the whole sentence, being especially careful about the trouble spot.

At first you won't be able to imitate my FL pronunciation exactly, because of course all your speaking muscles will try to follow their English pronunciation habits. And your English listening habits may often make it hard for you to hear when I pronounce a FL word with some sounds that you aren't accustomed to hear or speak in English. Don't worry: this always happens when people begin to learn a foreign language. I'll just keep repeating the FL pronunciation. All you have to do is listen carefully and watch the way my lips and jaw are moving when I speak the FL sentence. Imitate everything you hear and see, just as closely as you can. I will hear any mistakes you make, because I know both FL and English pronunciation habits. So I will stop the practice from time to time to correct a pronunciation that needs to be changed in order to build up the right FL-speaking habits.

Now we're ready to begin our first practice with some simple short FL sentences.....

III. Tactics of presenting material for oral habit-forming

Larger to smaller group — "Another way of saying it" — The backward build-up — Speed-up practice — The teaching of ü and ö

* *

Larger to smaller group

In presenting new material, or familiar material in a new form, it is wise to begin with choral practice by the entire class, then by various sections of the class, then by rows, and only then by individual students. In this way, embarrassment is reduced, since by the time an individual performs alone he has already produced the material many times as a member of a group. Furthermore, there is an "error-blanketing" effect in large-group performance. The individual uncertainties and errors tend to cancel each other out, and what is heard as a kind of average is likely to be better than most individual performance would be during the first few imitations and repetitions.

"Another way of saying it"

One difficulty in language teaching is that every now and then a question comes up about a particular sentence. Sometimes a student has heard at home or from some friend of the family who has been in a FL-speaking country that there is an alternative for a sentence. Often the suggested alternative is restricted as to region or dialect or social situation. But there is no time in the first-year class to discuss such complicated matters.

The simplest way to handle this situation, many teachers have found, is to say something like this: "Yes, that's another way to say it. Later on in the course we'll learn that way too. But right now we'll have just this one way of saying it, and practice that until we know it. After you have learned this one, we'll practice other ways later on."

The backward build-up

Many teachers and textbook writers are today aware of the "seven-syllable limit" — the difficulty of grasping, remembering, and reproducing more than seven unfamiliar syllables in sequence. So the presentation of wholly new material ought to stay within this seven-syllable limit. But of course some very useful sentences, and even some sentence parts, exceed the seven-syllable limit.

When a sentence is too long for recognition and imitation within the seven-syllable memory span, it calls for cumulative partial presentations in a backward build-up. First the teacher pronounces the whole sentence four or five times, in its entirety. Then the sentence is "broken up from the end"; the last word or grammatical word-group is practiced, then the next-to-last plus the last, then the last three words or grammatical word-groups as one imitation-unit. In this way the sentence is learned through the imitation of successively larger parts of it, starting with the last and then the last two, the last three parts, until the entire sentence is being pronounced as a whole. (It is important, of course, that at every stage what is being pronounced

should be a possible remark or a possible answer to a question.) For example, if the sentence were "I think they're going to Pittsburgh next Tuesday on the afternoon bus" the backward build-up stages could be "The afternoon bus — On the afternoon bus — Next Tuesday on the afternoon bus — To Pittsburgh next Tuesday on the afternoon bus — They're going to Pittsburgh next Tuesday on the afternoon bus — I think they're going to Pittsburgh next Tuesday on the afternoon bus."

The language-structure reason for building up from the end is that the important melody intonation comes at the end of a FL sentence or clause, and we want to keep practicing in such a way that "the end is always the end." If we did the first part by itself, we would have to stop in midair so far as the sentence-melody intonation is concerned, or put on an unreal end-intonation that we would have to change as soon as the following part is added in the next practice.

There is also a learning-psychology reason for the backward build-up. The learner is gaining in both accuracy and confidence, since he is always moving onward toward a more-practiced section at the end of each performance, where he knows he can do it correctly; so his confidence increases rather than fades as he practices.

Speed-up practice

In the course of presenting a sentence or phrase through successive imitations and repetitions by groups and individuals, the pace of pronunciation is likely to be slowed down. It is a natural tendency for the students to imitate a little more slowly than the teacher's normal speed pronunciation, and after a while this has its effect on the teacher's own pace. An occasional corrective measure, which is also a desirable touch of variety, is a brief "speed-up" practice. As a kind of game, the teacher calls for full-class practice with single imitation; then the teacher pronounces the sentence (for class imitation) four or five times, at increasing speed. Of course before this speed-up the teacher and the students have pronounced the Basic Sentence many times, and it is becoming so familiar that it is almost automatic. So both teacher and students can now produce it at breakneck speed, as a kind of tongue-twister game. This counteracts the slow-down and drawling that tends to creep in. And then, when the teacher moves on to the next Basic Dialogue Sentence, there is a kind of relief at getting back to normal speed again.

Naturally this speed-up procedure must not be overdone. It should not be resorted to more than once or twice in a session of presentation of sentences, or occasionally with

a stubborn sentence in a conversation or some form of practice -- otherwise it loses its effectiveness.

On the teaching of rounded front vowels

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The examples here are taken from German, but of course the principles — linguistic and pedagogical — are equally applicable to French, the Scandinavian languages, and other languages with rounded front vowels.

It is a familiar fact that the beginner's difficulty in pronouncing [ü] and [ö] is caused by the requirement of combining a front tongue position with some lip rounding. There is no physiological difficulty in this combination, in terms of the human muscular apparatus. The difficulty results from the fact that this particular combination of muscular movements and positions is not normally practiced in speaking English. In American speech, lip movements are relatively small. And in so far as any lip movement is habitual for speakers of American English, a front tongue position is accompanied by spread rather than rounded lips (a grin rather than a pout). An additional difficulty is introduced when the beginner approaches the pronunciation problem by way of the written word: The German spellings of "ü" and "ö" tend to suggest the tongue positions of [u] and [o], and are therefore misleading; similarly, the French writings "u" and "eu" may suggest a back-vowel articulation.

A procedure of presenting [ü] and [ö] which is effective for many learners of German should be helpful for other FLs, especially when the spelling system is potentially confusing, like the French spellings "u, eu". This is the procedure of considering the lip rounding to be a phenomenon of the syllable or even of the word — not merely a phenomenon of the vowel. The beginner is instructed to pronounce the entire word, or at least the stressed syllable, with rounded lips. When the instructional method is one of direct imitation by mimicry, the beginner is instructed to mimic the teacher's facial expression as well as the sounds being produced. The lips, because of their prominence in all changes of facial expression, are easily controlled in this way.

Indeed, it is often useful to go even further: The students are told to close their eyes and then listen to and try to mimic words or phrases involving [ü] or [ö]: for example, "fünf; elf, zwölf". For a half-dozen or so repetitions, the class blindly repeats [finf; elf, zwelf].* Then the students are instructed to open their eyes and go through the same process, this time imitating facial expression as well as the sound. Result: [fünf; elf, zwölf].

* footnote on page 27-X

This procedure is based on a well-known phonetic fact: An articulatory movement or position which is essential for one sound of a syllable may be begun before the occurrence of the segment for which it is essential; and the position may be both assumed considerably before and maintained

Footnote to text on page 26

*The danger of inculcating an incorrect pronunciation by a few repetitions of an unrounded vowel sound is small enough to be disregarded, especially since the students are aware that this pronunciation is tentative and imperfect. It is important to establish the proper tongue position, based upon the acoustic impression, as a necessary preliminary to the exact, complete imitation.

considerably after the occurrence of the sound of which it is an essential element.

The lips are relatively less agile than the other organs of speech. Hence they are likely to anticipate a required position relatively long before the occurrence of a sound for which it is essential, and to be relatively slow in leaving such a position. In actual speaking, the lip-rounding which is essential for [ü] and [ö] sets in at the beginning of the syllable, considerably before the occurrence of the vowel itself, and persists after the vowel through the remainder of the syllable.

A procedure of teaching lip-rounding as a syllable phenomenon has the pedagogical advantage of diverting attention away from the un-English combination of lip- and tongue-positions during the production of the vowel itself, and distributes one factor of that unusual combination (the lip-position) over the entire syllable or word.

Further, this procedure is in conformity with the facts of German pronunciation. One may test one's own lip movements in the pronunciation of such a word as "glühend": during the [g-] , indeed before the [g-], there is already a marked lip-rounding. A comparison of the lip positions of the [g-] and [-l-] in "glühend" and "Glieder" shows that the entire syllable, not merely the vowel, is pronounced with rounded lips for "glühend" and with spread lips for "Glieder". To be sure, this fact does not require teaching

a "rounded-lip [g]" or a "rounded-lip [l]" in German: it is the syllable, not any one segment of it, that is 'rounded-lip or spread-lip. In the speech of some Germans, the lip-rounding occasionally persists throughout a following unstressed syllable: "öffnen, führen" etc.*

* footnote on page 29-X

The application of this procedure must vary, according to the basic teaching practice being followed. When a completely imitative, mimicry technique is being used, the device of first listening and imitating with closed eyes, then listening, looking, and imitating the instructor's facial expression as well as the sound, is the obvious course. When more explicit phonetic explanations are being given, the principle can be formulated in the statement: Whenever a syllable contains the vowel [ü] or [ö], that entire syllable is pronounced with rounded lips (with the tongue-and-jaw position of [i] or [e] for the vowel).

Footnote to text on page 28

*This phenomenon of the persistence of lip-posture through a sequence of sounds can be observed in a language which, like English, does not have rounded front vowels. Observe the lips of a native speaker of English pronouncing "scruple", with lip-rounding throughout the first syllable — often throughout the entire word — and compare the lip-posture for "screeching"; the attempt to pronounce either word with the "wrong" lip position feels, looks, and sounds unnatural.

IV. Tactics of oral practice

Chain practice — Reversed roles — Hesitation and fumbling — Supplying a needed word — Minimum responses — Dramatic reading

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Chain practice

A student, for example at the end of a row, asks the student next to him a question from the basic dialogue, and that student answers with the reply that follows in the dialogue. Then the answerer becomes a questioner, and asks the student next to him the same question, and receives the same reply. After at most five pairs have engaged in this chain, the teacher can interrupt by instructing the student who has just answered: "Ask me that." Then the teacher can answer ("reversed roles"). Either this terminates the chain practice, or it gives the teacher the opportunity to start a new chain in an unexpected part of the classroom.

Reversed roles

One very useful device in oral practice is that of "reversing the roles." After a short dialogue or question-and-answer practice in which the teacher questions and a student (or students) answer, or after a student-student question-and-answer practice, the teacher says "Ask me that question." In this way the student then practices the question, and the teacher gives an answer.

There are several uses of the "reversed roles" device. It is a convenient way of ending or shifting a chain of student-student question-and-answer practice, Chain practice is an effective classroom procedure. But it must not become too long, or students in other parts of the room may become inattentive. By reversing roles, the teacher can quickly shift a chain practice from one group to another, and thus maintain liveliness and student alertness.

Another important use of reversed roles is to combat a cumulative error. If one student's answer contains a mistake or inaccuracy, it is likely to be imitated by following students in their responses. By quietly reversing roles, the teacher can once more model the response, and may call for some choral practice on it, before resuming the individual practice.

(By the way: the classroom management of role-reversal illustrates how the FL can be introduced into classroom instructions. For example: At first, the teacher may use English, accompanied by a gesture — perhaps pointing first to a student or group and then to himself — as he says "Ask

me that question." After enough times to assure the association of the gesture and the meaning of the instruction, the teacher can shift without comment to the use of the FL along with the same gesture, since the now familiar gesture will give the meaning of the instruction. Soon the gesture can be omitted as the FL expression becomes familiar. With some foresight and patience, this technique can be used to introduce, one after another, needed classroom instructions in the FL. Decide on an appropriate gesture; use it along with an English instruction until the association is established; then shift to the FL with the gesture; and finally omit the gesture. Naturally, such instructions are for the students' recognition and understanding only, and there is no need for the students to practice producing them.)

Some care is needed in calling for reversed roles, since some question-and-answer formulas might not be suitable for reversal. For example, the gender forms of nouns and adjectives may limit reversal. Not all teachers would welcome questions about address, telephone number, and similar data.

Hesitation and fumbling

The nature and purposes of oral practice in the classroom call for certain procedures that would not be used in courses of a different nature. For example, how

does the language teacher handle hesitation and fumbling in an oral-practice exercise? In many subjects, in order to keep up a good pace and cover the material, a teacher may pass quickly to another student and hope that the hesitating or fumbling one will learn the proper bit of information from the other student's correct answer. This procedure does not work in language practice; the fumbler must do his own practicing to form his own habits.

Accordingly, whenever a student hesitates, the teacher immediately supplies the proper model for immediate imitation by the student. Even if the student (given time) might possibly have figured out the right answer, the teacher should supply the model at once: a sentence has not been sufficiently learned until it can be produced without delay.

Often when a student has fumbled or hesitated, a teacher calls for a brief review practice with a larger group (the half class or the row) including the fumbler. Then the fumbler himself is called on to perform.

When this procedure is quietly but consistently followed, the students very soon learn that they cannot escape full performance by hesitating.

Supplying a needed word

When a student fumbles or hesitates while searching for a word, we can use the device of normal conversation under such circumstances: The teacher supplies the appropriate word

with a questioning (rising) intonation, implying "Is this a word which would express your meaning?" We all do this in conversation in our native language with friends, and the use of the device in fluency practice feels normal and thus contributes to a relaxed cooperative use of the FL, without slowing down the classroom operation unduly. At the same time it reinforces student familiarity with a useful word, for all members of the class as well as for the performing student.

Minimum responses

An important device to maintain and develop oral competence is the insistence on the students' use of a few standard oral classroom expressions as minimum responses in the FL, like "I don't understand the word ——— . What does ——— mean? I understand the question, but I don't know the answer. I can't find the line where the answer is." Such minimum responses in the FL are less satisfactory than a correct factual answer, so far as content-comprehension is concerned. But they serve a very important function of supplying the student with something to say even under the worst conditions, and thus sparing him the frustration of sitting in embarrassed silence. It is essential to insist that one of these minimum responses be given, every time that a student is unable to frame any better answer. For the shy student, the availability of such stock responses prevents

his drawing further into his shell. For all students there is a build-up of morale and confidence if they are always able to speak in the FL every time an oral exchange involves them. Such responses also serve the practical classroom purpose of helping the teacher focus at once on the real difficulty: failure to understand a particular word or a lapse of memory or inability to find an item of information in the text.

"Dramatic reading"

When we speak of learning to read, we are actually referring to the learning of two separate and quite different skills: (1) making appropriate noises in response to marks on paper — in other words, reading aloud; and (2) reading for meaning, silent reading. Effective reading aloud demands preparation. Not even a trained reader reading something in his native language can perform effectively "reading cold" — he must first scan the passage and ascertain the meaning of what he is to read before he can supply the proper rhythm and sentence-melody to his reading and make its meaning clear to his hearers. Dramatic reading, as the term is used here, involves the development of a rather special reading skill, one whose importance at this stage must be emphasized. In "reading" a conversation, after the initial aural-oral practice, the students are directed to (1) look

at the printed text as a reminder, and then (2) look up and speak the proper sentence or phrase. It is important that the students should not be looking at the text while they are speaking; the interference of FL spelling with pronunciation must be minimized, and the bad practice of speaking word-by-word avoided.

It will require some training for most of the students to follow this custom. But it is desirable to go to considerable trouble to assure that it will become standard behavior when print is involved in an exercise. If this custom is followed regularly, the students are not only memorizing the particular passage but are also laying the foundations for later reading by sense-groups rather than single words.

V. From oral practice to oral skill: the intermediate levels

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Maintaining and developing competence

Oral proficiency is only one aspect — although a crucial one — in a planned transition from "drill" to "use": We start from the results of the very careful guidance during the introductory phase, and we aim at ultimately providing the students with the resources needed for practical versatile communication in the FL.

Accuracy and fluency

It is useful to distinguish between oral accuracy and oral fluency. Although the two are by no means the same, there is no permanent conflict between them. There is, however, a stage when over-emphasis on oral accuracy may inhibit the development of fluency, or when a lack of guidance in developing fluency may cause a temporary deterioration in accuracy. For most learners a second-level course represents these stages.

In the paragraphs that follow we analyze the problems of maintaining and developing oral competence, we examine the types of materials suitable for various purposes of oral practice, and we suggest classroom procedures for the balanced attainment of the overall objectives of increased oral competence.

Oral accuracy

Accuracy refers to an acceptable pronunciation of the phonetic elements (the vowels and consonants, the stress and melody features, tempo and pause timings) in phrases and sentences as well as in individual words or syllables. At the beginning of the course it must be expected that there will still be a few stubborn pronunciation difficulties for all but the best motivated and most gifted mimics: After all, the students' FL pronunciation practice is still only a matter of a few hundred hours, as against the long-established and constantly-practiced speech habits of their native language, some of which conflict seriously with the desired new FL pronunciation habits.

On the grammatical plane of oral performance, ideal accuracy consists of the unhesitating use of the correct grammatical structures, such as: the proper agreement of verbs with subjects, of adjectives with nouns; the proper forms of the subject, or direct and indirect objects; the proper plural forms of nouns; the stem forms as well as the endings of irregular verbs; and the all-important features of word order. The control of these structures, like the control of pronunciation, has to be habitual and automatic, because there simply isn't enough time in conversation to stop and think about these basic patterns of linguistic behavior.

Oral fluency

Oral fluency is a quite different skill. It is the ability to talk readily about a variety of topics, creating new sentences to tell about or ask about new situations. This is obviously a high-priority objective in a complete FL program. When a student can speak fluently and accurately about the topics that are meaningful to him, he is equipped to behave in a effective way through the FL. And the practice of fluent speaking also reinforces the ability to read rapidly and comprehendingly, by building up habits of correct word-grouping in the reading process.

It is clear that in the early stages the development of fluency involves a danger to accuracy. The very fact that fluency consists in the student's creating new sentences "on his own" means that he runs the risk of making incorrect sentences. He may mistakenly combine two or more constructions of the model sentences he already knows in order to create the new sentence; he may follow an inappropriate analogy within the FL or — much more likely — he may follow some sentence-building analogy from his native language, when he has to create a new sentence. Since his attention is rightly focused on selecting the vocabulary needed to cope with the meaning, the unconscious lapsing into native-language grammar, and often even pronunciation, is understandable.

Nevertheless, these are risks and dangers that have to be faced up to sometime, or the learner will never get beyond

the stage of apron-string guidance. The very firm control and rigorous limitations on the beginner's performance, as a protection against forming bad habits, must be judiciously relaxed during an intermediate stage, to develop realism in the use of the language, and to increase the confidence and versatility of the learner.

Oral practice in the classroom

In first-level work, oral accuracy had a higher priority than fluency. At the second level, fluency begins to become a major objective. This involves a conscious and planned shift in classroom procedures, as compared with those of the beginning phase. The students must now become aware that, although accuracy is of course still a major objective, it is no longer the only objective of oral practice.

It is the teacher's task to distinguish in the classroom between (1) the times when accuracy should be insisted on, using the rigorous corrective and reinforcing procedures of the introductory course, and (2) the times when fluency is the main goal, and correction must be tempered to avoid discouragement and lack of confidence.

As a general principle it is unwise to call attention to minor inaccuracies during exercises primarily aimed at developing fluency. However, like most general principles, this one has to be observed with discretion. If a particular mistake is occurring repeatedly, it is necessary to halt it

and replace it with a correct form or pronunciation. When this happens, an approximation to polite adult conversation is desirable, like "Yes." Then the correct sentence is given, without too conspicuous emphasis on the correction. "Isn't that so?" Then the correct sentence again.

This restraint in correction is properly balanced by occasional praise of a particularly good and correct performance, as an indirect reminder and an effective reinforcement of accuracy.